2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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621 move for religious feasts and family celebrations. Sometimes a
794 number of these farms are clustered around a chapel or small
795 church dependent upon the parish church. In time, these hamlets may disappear; historical sources cite many which have long since vanished.[1] On the other hand, a hamlet may grow to the point where its inhabitants can afford to build a larger church and in other ways successfully press their claim to become a separate
632 parish. Most rural parishes in Malta and Gozo have come into
794 being in this way. Some towns have been divided into two or
795 more parishes for administrative reasons. In Malta, Qormi and Valletta are each divided into two parishes, and Sliema into three.
[578] Rabat in Gozo is currently being divided into two parishes. But because of fierce rivalry between the residents of the territories concerned, the exact boundary line is disputed and the territorial division will probably take another generation to complete.

79 The parish priest, who in all but the smallest parishes is assisted by a curate or more, is responsible to the Church for the care of
[609] the souls of all Catholics resident in his parish. Except where foreign service personnel live with their families – notably in Rabat, Naxxar, Mosta, St. Paul's Bay, Luqa and Birżebbuga – all villagers are Catholic, and are thus the priest's parishioners. These parishioners also form part of the corporate body of the Church.

793 The clergy in Malta, as in all other Catholic countries, are divided into two main groups: the secular or diocesan clergy, and the regular clergy. Diocesan priests are trained in the Bishop's Seminary and are directly subject to the authority of the Bishop. A further distinction is made between those diocesan priests whose families or patrons have been able to provide them with a benefice – either property or cash deposited at the Curia bank – yielding a minimum of £10 annually, and those who have received their benefices from their Bishop. After the first five years the former, who are by far the most numerous, are free to serve where they wish. The latter always remain at the service of their Bishop. Most parishes are run by diocesan priests, and the clergy
[792] resident in the villages belong to this group. The friars and monks of the regular clergy are members of religious orders. They have been trained in the seminaries and houses of their particular orders.

[1] An interesting study of villages which have disappeared is given in M. Richardson, *Aspects of the Demography of Modern Malta* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Durham, 1960), pp. 243 ff.

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the village, which draws in native sons and daughters from all over the country, and often from as far away as Canada and Australia. This loyalty is also evident at other times. Villagers like to think of themselves as a united body, and they take care to protect the appearance of unity before strangers. This is an attitude of which anyone studying the social history of a village becomes keenly aware. Strangers are thus treated with great reserve. The inhabitants of the smaller villages are well known for their reluctance to give any information about their neighbours to strangers. Inquiring visitors are often referred to the parish priest, who, as village spokesman, screens them and, if possible, deals with their questions. The reserve of a village *vis-à-vis* a stranger is considerably more than just an expression of village loyalty. Present also is the very real fear of vengeance should the answer to a stranger's question lead to some unpleasantness for a neighbour. Social relations in a small village are to a very considerable extent governed by the proverb 'Don't make an enemy of your neighbour' (*Taghmilx ghadu lil ġarek*).

In view of this loyalty, it is not surprising that people express their solidarity with their native village by opposition to other villages. A village's traditional rivals are usually those with which it has the most frequent contact. I was almost invariably warned by villagers that the inhabitants of the neighbouring village were a treacherous and savage lot. There are many tales of hostility between neighbouring villages, especially over the celebration of the annual festa, which I dare say have lost nothing in retelling. I was told a number of stories of how youths stampeded goats through their rivals' festa processions, and of expeditions which stole fireworks, attacked street decorations and performed other daring escapades. Although most of these adventures are said to have taken place many years ago, they are no more unusual than some of the incidents that I witnessed.

If the intense inter-village rivalry of former times has abated somewhat, it is probably because increased education and contact outside the villages have helped to break down ignorance and isolation. But this rivalry still lies dormant, and may flare up at the slightest provocation from a traditional rival; I have seen a number of fights over trivial incidents during festas and football matches. The number of police at village feasts and the quantity and density of the barbed-wire entanglements at the Schreiber

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CHAPTER IV

The Basis of Leadership

The Maltese word for leader, *mexxej*, is seldom heard, and then only in reference to the leader of a political party. I once asked a parish priest who were the leaders of the village. He laughed and replied that there weren't any, because his parishioners did not like leaders. With the exception of the professionals and *il-puliti* from the towns, all the inhabitants of a village usually call one another by their Christian names and in general look upon each other as equals. This egalitarian outlook is compounded of many factors, of which the most important are similar occupation, standard of living and values, the detailed knowledge of each other's personal lives that comes with residence in a face-to-face community, and jealousy. Any person who attempts to lead or to try to start something new – such as a village playground – is derided. His true motive is seen as self aggrandizement and his enemies and envious neighbours are quick to point this out to others who may not have realized it. 'Envy follows the wise man like his shadow' (*L-ghira titrot wara l-gharef bhal dellu mieghu*), goes the Maltese proverb. Professionals and outsiders, especially if they are from the town, are occasionally able to start something new. Their social distance from most of the community protects them from the full impact of the envy and gossip which moulds so much of village life.

But in spite of the absence of official lay leaders and the conservative pressure of envy and gossip, there are a number of persons who have a greater say than others in the affairs of the community. They are able to do this by virtue of their social position, their occupation or office in one of the village associations or their influence with the parish priest. These persons, together with the parish priest, form the aggregate which can be said to run the affairs of the community. While there is no generic term for this aggregate, those who compose it are sometimes referred to as *il-kbarat*, 'the big ones', or more derogatively as